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SUBJECT: JAWA POS: FIRST HAND-COVERAGE OF BURMA CRISIS, INTERNATIONAL
EVENTS

REF: SURABAYA 49

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This message is sensitive but unclassified. Please protect accordingly.

¶1. (SBU) Summary: During a visit by the Surabaya Principal Officer, Public Affairs Officer, and Public Affairs Assistant to the Surabaya headquarters of the Jawa Pos Group October 19, Jawa Pos editors and journalists described their efforts to provide accessible and relevant news coverage to readers throughout Eastern Indonesia. Jawa Pos deployed a team of journalists to Burma and Thailand to provide on-the-spot coverage of the developing crisis. Jawa Pos ran daily stories, analysis, commentary and pictures, including critical editorials of the Indonesian government's inaction. Jawa Pos officials explained that it was important for Indonesian readers to see the strength of peaceful demonstrations against unjust governments. Jawa Pos has reported recently from Suriname, and currently has a journalist reporting from Israel. End Summary.

¶2. (U) The Jawa Pos Group, or Jawa Pos News Network (JPNN), publishes over 100 local newspapers from Aceh in Sumatra to Jayapura in Papua. The combined readership makes Jawa Pos the largest provider of news in Indonesia. Dahlan Iskan, the former Surabaya bureau chief of TEMPO magazine, attained ownership of Jawa Pos in 1982. Each regional paper makes its own editorial decisions about which articles to publish, but liberally draws on reporting from other Jawa Pos papers. JPNN has expanded into TV, owning JTV in Surabaya, Batam TV in Batam, and Riau TV in Pekanbaru. On October 19, Surabaya Principal Officer, PAO, and PA Assistant visited the Surabaya offices of Jawa Pos, the flagship newspaper of the organization with an average circulation of 350,000 per day, to discuss the operating philosophy behind the organization.

PUBLISHING THE PEOPLES' PAPERS

¶3. (SBU) The Jawa Pos Group prides itself on publishing newspapers that are "peoples' papers" -- newspapers which provide the news in a format that is accessible and interesting. Chief Editor Rohman Budijanto described Jawa Pos as a "soap opera" when compared to the "theater" offered by national rival Kompas newspaper group. In recent years, Jawa Pos has struggled

to address criticisms that the Group was willing to sacrifice accuracy for telling a good story. Today, under the motto "selalu ada yang baru" (there is always something new), Jawa Pos deploys its reporters to far-flung locations, including Burma, Thailand, Israel, and Suriname, to provide first-hand accounts of issues it deems relevant to its readers. Jawa Pos is unique among Indonesian media organizations in its willingness to spend money to send journalists to cover international issues and events

14. (SBU) Budijanto explained why Jawa Pos had recently sent reporters to Suriname, a country little known in Indonesia. According to Budijanto, more than 20% of Suriname's population is ethnically Javanese. This population immigrated during Indonesia's and Suriname's Dutch colonial period, and speak a purer form of Javanese than that of their Indonesian counterparts. Jawa Pos's reporting has translated into an upcoming visit to East Java by delegates from Suriname, including the ethnic Javanese Speaker of Parliament.

COVERING THE CRISIS IN BURMA

15. (SBU) Jawa Pos's coverage of the protests and crackdown in Burma is perhaps the most illustrative example of the newspaper group's efforts to tell the entire story. Only one of two Indonesian newspapers to send journalists to Burma and the Thai-Burmese border to provide first-hand coverage of the unfolding crisis, Jawa Pos ran daily articles, analysis, commentary, and pictures on its front page and in its international section tracking developments and international reaction. Kardono Setyorakhmadi, one of the reporters who had just returned from Burma and Thailand after three weeks on the ground, joined our October 19 meeting.

16. (SBU) While the reporters were in Burma itself, Jawa Pos protected their individual identities, ascribing reports to the Jawa Pos team of reporters. In one such report, the Jawa Pos

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reported that a Burmese official in Shan Province had told the Jawa Pos team that at least five generals and 400 soldiers had been detained by the junta after they disobeyed orders to shoot Buddhist monks near Mandalay. Kardono explained to us that Burmese authorities restricted his movement to within the borders of the Shan state, but that he was able to speak with a wide range of local officials, activists, and refugees. After his departure from Burmese territory, Kardono's reporting appeared under his byline. His reporting from within Burma and along the Thai-Burmese border provided powerful pictures and personal accounts of midnight raids, detentions of monks and civilians, and the junta's brutality. Another journalist, Tomy Gutomo, filed reports based on interviews with individuals in Rangoon.

17. (SBU) In addition to reporting on criticism of President Yudhoyono and the Indonesian government by Jakarta politicians for failing to take a firm stand against the military junta, Jawa Pos carried extensive coverage of international reaction to the demonstrations and subsequent crackdown. On October 8, Jawa Pos published an editorial accusing Indonesia of failing to play a leadership role in ASEAN or the UN Security Council on Burma.

POWER OF THE PEOPLE

18. (SBU) Asked why Jawa Pos had decided to dedicate significant resources to covering events in Burma, Budijanto explained that Burma was not only a neighbor and member of ASEAN, but also that Indonesia's position in ASEAN and the UN made the government's response, or lack thereof, relevant to Jawa Pos readers. He compared events in Burma to similar demonstrations in the Philippines which had resulted in the overthrow of President Marcos. During the Philippine crisis, Jawa Pos sent a reporter to cover events and the paper's circulation doubled. Budijanto

elaborated that while the situations in the Philippines and Burma were not parallel, and the psychological differences between Buddhist Burma and Muslim Indonesia were relevant, it was important for Indonesians to see the impact and strength of people willing to demonstrate to overthrow a dictator.

ISRAEL AND WASHINGTON

¶9. (SBU) Coverage of the Burma crisis did not increase circulation, but neither did circulation fall during the extended Lebaran holiday season when most Indonesians returned to their villages to celebrate the end of Ramadan with family. Jawa Pos received positive feedback from its on-the-ground reporting and plans to expand such coverage. A Jawa Pos journalist traveled to Israel recently on an Israeli-sponsored tour and has been filing stories from the road. The Jawa Pos published an interview with Israeli FM Livni and other reporting from Israel just before the Indonesia visit of Palestinian President Abbas, reflecting some effort to present a balanced picture of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Budijanto said that the journalist was given permission by his editors to stay in the region longer to report on Middle East issues from other countries.

¶10. (SBU) Jawa Pos has not had a journalist stationed in the U.S. since the 1997 Asian financial crisis, but has sent a journalist to cover an Islamic conference hosted by the Islamic Society of North America in Chicago and sent journalists to the U.S. on programs funded by the Foreign Press Center. Jawa Pos is considering assigning a journalist permanently to Washington to cover the U.S. presidential election.

MCCLELLAND